



DECEMBER 2013

In December, the world has turned dim, with our inner lights shining brighter than before. We find ourselves quieter, turned more inward, and our tea reflects this—sessions become quieter, softer and truer. This is a true practice, in harmony with Nature, which is becoming more and more Yin as the winter progresses, culminating in the solstice. More and more we turn to dark, aged teas and shou Puerh. We often boil teas, happy for the added warmth. At the center, we also switch from coconut-husk charcoal to the hardwood coal of the dragon eye (*long yen*) tree, which burns brighter and with a livelier flame that adds deeper heat to the water, a nice smell to the atmosphere as well as some added warmth.

In the lunar calendar, the eleventh month is called the “Winter Moon”. It is a time of retreat, as well as celebration of the Winter Solstice—the day when the sunlight is at its weakest. Yin is at its greatest on this day. There is therefore more of a movement inward. This is natural: people and animals spend more and more time indoors and travel less as the winter progresses. Inside, sequestered by Nature, it is a great time to practice more internal self-cultivation. The silence and tranquility of Nature encourages such work and helps lead us inward—the Yin energy of the earth supporting a quieter, more tranquil mind. The solstice is also a celebration of change, though, as we have reached the depth of Yin, which must also begin to recede—every subsequent day becomes more Yang from here on out...

Chinese people like to eat red bean soup for the Winter Solstice. Legend has it that a man’s son died in a terrible accident on this day and his troubled spirit began to haunt people and make them sick every winter’s Solstice. The man knew that his son hated red beans, and was afraid of them, so he taught the people to make this sweet soup every winter, chasing his son’s spirit away. Without anyone to haunt, and with the prayers of his family, his son’s soul finally found rest.

In the I Ching, two hexagrams are associated with the solstices. The 24th hexagram is the Winter Solstice. It is a single Yang line on the bottom, with five Yin lines above. It is called “Returning”. In the I Ching, the bottom line is the beginning and the top the end of the change, so this hexagram represents a situation almost completely in darkness (Yin), with a Yang line at

the “entrance”—light entering and returning to darkness, symbolizing the fact that days will only get lighter from here on. Winter solstice was seen as a time for rest and renewal. Nature is also dormant, resting and gathering strength. The sages interpreted this to mean that we also take it easy, gather our strength and return to health. Rest, care and forbearance are needed to move forward.

A big part of our renewal at this time of year is a reunion with our loved ones for the holidays. Spending time with your friends or family to celebrate this holiday season can be stressful or it can be a time of great ease, joy and renewal—deepening our love and connection to one another, and getting some much needed time together. This is a great opportunity to set down our busy schedules and work, take a break to really look at one another, making new memories with our loved ones and reminiscing the old. And don’t forget, Tea can do wonders in bringing us together, healing wounds and finding connection in a heart space...

December Affirmation: What do I celebrate?

Nothing you acquire will be able to teach you how to celebrate. A million dollars won’t show you how to celebrate; a million dollars is a reason to celebrate. Similarly, no experience—no trip or self-help book, no course or retreat—will show you how to celebrate. If you cannot celebrate what you already have, nothing you get will show you how. We must learn to celebrate the things that are already in our lives, if we are to celebrate when a new reason presents itself. If you cannot celebrate this breath, this sunny day or the newly fallen snow, you won’t celebrate any windfall of money or an ecstatic experience (not for long, anyway). Ask yourself what you have to celebrate today. Remember when you were a child? Remember how easy it was to celebrate things? Children are always ready to celebrate (and so are puppies like Fiona). They will celebrate anything, even the color purple! This month, find your inner child. Rather than fighting grumpily the materialism of the holiday season, or anything else you don’t like about it, rest in the spirit of celebration and bring a smile to the season—in the true spirit of the holidays! Be the change you want to see in the holidays!